

BECOMING-WOMAN

&

**I HAVE EVEN MET
HAPPY DRAG QUEENS**



FHAR, 1973

body. From whence comes the counterdependence to which they try to reduce women or the predatory sexual behaviors which they adopt in regard to them. Economic and sexual exploitation cannot be dissociated. Bureaucracies and the bourgeoisie maintain their power by basing themselves on sexual segregation, age, classes, races, and codification of attitudes and class stratification. Imitation of these same segregations and stratifications by militants (for example, refusal to look closely at the concrete alienation of women and children, as possessive and dominating attitudes, at respect for the bourgeois separation of private life and public activity, etc.) constitutes one of the foundations of the present bureaucratization of the revolutionary workers' movement. Listening to the real desires of the people implies that one is capable of listening to one's own desire and to that of one's most immediate entourage. That doesn't at all mean that we should put class struggles way down on the ladder beneath desire struggles. On the contrary, each juncture between them will bring an unexpected energy to the former.

That is the "front" on which, with much modesty and tenacity, the Mirabelles work. But they especially don't want us to take them seriously; they are struggling for something more important than what is "serious." (Their motto: "Drag and monetary crisis. Drag green bean...") What interests them is to help pull homosexuality out of its ghetto, even if it is a militant ghetto; what interests them is that shows like theirs touch not only homosexual circles, but also the mass of people who just don't feel good about themselves.



I Have Even Met Happy Drag Queens

The Mirabelles are experimenting with a new type of militant theatre, the theatre separate from the explanatory language, and long tirades of good intentions, for example, on gay liberation. They resort to draft, song, mime, dance, etc., not as different ways of illustrating a theme, to “change the ideas” of the spectators, but in order to trouble them, to stir up uncertain desire-zones that they always more or less refuse to explore. The question is no longer to know whether one will play feminine against masculine or the reverse, but to make bodies, all bodies, break away from the representations and restraints of the “social body,” and from stereotyped situations, attitudes and behaviors, of the “breast-plate” of the Wilhelm Reich spoke. Sexual alienation, one of capitalism’s foundations, implies that the social body is polarized in masculinity, whereas the feminine body is transformed into an object of lust, a piece of merchandise to which one cannot have access except through guilt and by submitting to all the system’s mechanisms (marriage, family, work, etc.). Desire, on the other hand, has to manage as best it can. In fact it deserts man’s body in order to emigrate to the side of the woman, or more precisely, to becoming woman side. What is essential here is not the object in question, but the transformational movement. It’s this movement, this passage, that the Mirabelles help us explore: a man who loves his own body, a man who loves a woman’s body or another man’s is himself always secretly characterized by a “becoming-woman.”

This is, of course, much different than an identification to the woman, even less to the mother, as psychoanalysts would have us believe. Instead, it is a question of a different becoming, a state in order to become something other than that which is repressive social body has forced us to be. Just as workers, despite the exploitation on their work power, succeed in establishing a certain kind of relationship to the world’s reality, women, despite the sexual exploitation which they undergo, succeed in establishing a true relationship to desire. *And they live this relationship primarily on the level of their bodies.* And if at the economic level the bourgeoisie is nothing without the proletariat, men aren’t much where bodies are concerned, if they do not achieve such a becoming-woman. From whence comes their dependence on the woman’s body or the woman image which haunts their dreams and their own bodies, or which they project onto their homosexual partner’s

Becoming-Woman

In the global social field, homosexualities function somewhat as movements, chapels with their own ceremonial, their initiation rites, their myths of love as Renée Nelli puts it. Despite the intervention of groupings of a more or less corporatist nature like Arcadia, homosexuality continues to be tied to the values and interactional systems of the dominant sexuality. Its dependence in regard to the heterosexual norm is manifested in a politics of the secret, a hiddenness nourished by repression as well as by a feeling of shame still lively in “respectable” milieus (particularly among businessmen, writers, show-biz people, etc.) in which psychoanalysis is presently the reigning master. It enforces a second-degree norm, no longer moral, but scientific. Homosexuality is no longer a moral matter, but a matter of perversion. Psychoanalysis makes an illness of it, a developmental retardation, a fixation at the pregenital state, etc.

On another, smaller and more avant-garde level is found militant homosexuality, of the FHAR type. Homosexuality confronts heterosexual power on its own terrain. How heterosexuality must account for itself; the problem is displaced, phallocratic power tends to be put into question; in principle, a conjunction between the actions of feminists and homosexuals then becomes possible.

However, we should perhaps distinguish a third level, a more molecular one in which categories, groupings, and “special instances” would not be differentiated in the same way, in which clear cut oppositions between types would be repudiated, in which, on the contrary, one would look for similarities among homosexuals, transvestites, drug addicts, sadomasochists, prostitutes, artists, revolutionaries, let’s say among all forms of sexual minorities once it is understood that that in this realm there could only be minorities. For example, it could be said, both at the same time: 1) that all forms of sexuality, all forms of sexual activity are fundamentally on this side of the personological oppositions of homo-hetero; 2) that nonetheless, they are closer to homosexuality and to what could be called a feminine becoming.

On the level of the social body, libido is caught in two systems of opposition: class and sex. It is expected to be male, phallocratic, it is expected to dichotomize all values—the oppositional strong/weak, rich/poor, useful/useless, clean/dirty, etc.

Conversely, on the level of the sexed body, libido is engaged in a becoming-woman. More precisely, the becoming-woman serves as a point of reference, and eventually as a screen for other types of becoming (example: becoming-child in Schumann, becoming-animal in Kafka, becoming-vegetable in Novalis, becoming-mineral in Beckett).

Becoming-woman can play this intermediary role, this role as mediator vis-à-vis other sexed becomings, because it is not too far removed from the binarism of phallic power. In order to understand the homosexual, we tell ourselves that it is sort of “like a woman.” And a number of homosexual themselves join in this somewhat normalizing game. The pair feminine/passive, masculine/active therefore remains a point of reference made obligatory by power in order to permit it to situate, localize, territorialize, control intensities of desire. Outside of this exclusive bi-pole, no salvation: or else it’s the plunge into the nonsensical, to the prison, to the asylum, to psychoanalysis, etc. Deviance, various forms of marginalism are themselves coded to work as safety valves. Women, in short, are the only official trustee of becoming-sexed body. A man who detaches himself from the phallic types inherent in all power formations will enter such a becoming-woman according to diverse possible modalities. It is only on this condition, moreover, that he will be able to become animal, cosmos, letter, color, music.

Homosexuality, by the very nature of things, cannot be dissociated from a becoming-woman—even non-Oedipal, nonpersonological homosexuality. The same holds true for infantile sexuality, psychotic sexuality, poetic sexuality (for instance: the coincidence, in Allen Ginsberg’s work, of the fundamental poetic mutation together with a sexual mutation). In a more general way, every “dissident” organization of libido must therefore be directly linked to a becoming-feminine body, as an escape route from the repressive *socius*, as a possible access to a “minimum” of sexed becoming, and as the last buoy vis-à-vis the established order. I emphasize this last point because the becoming-feminine body shouldn’t be thought of as belonging to the woman category found in the couple, the family, etc. Such a category only exists in a specific social field that defines it. There is no such thing as woman per se, no maternal pole, no eternal feminine... The man/woman opposition serves as a foundation to the social order, before class caste conflicts intervene. Conversely, whatever shatters norms, whatever breaks from the established order, is related to homosexuality or a becoming-animal or a becoming-woman, etc. Every semiotization

in rupture implies a sexualization in rupture. Thus, to my mind, we shouldn’t ask which writers are homosexual, but rather, what it is about a great writer—even if he is in fact heterosexual—that is homosexual.

I think it’s important to destroy “big” notions like woman, homosexual... Things are never that simple. When they’re reduced to black-white, male-female categories, there’s an ulterior motive, a binary-reductionist operation meant to subjugate them. For example, you cannot qualify a love univocally. Love in Proust is never specifically homosexual. It always has a shizoid, paranoid component, a becoming-plant, a becoming-woman, a becoming-music.

Orgasm is another overblown notion whose ravages are incalculable. Dominant sexual morality requires of the woman a quasi-hysterical identification of her orgasm with the man’s, an expression of symmetry, a submission to his phallic power. The woman *owes her orgasm to the man*. In “refusing” him, she assumes the guilt. So many stupid dramas are based on this theme. And the sententious attitude of psychoanalysts and sexologists on this point doesn’t really help. In fact, it frequently happens that women who, for some reason or other, are frozen with male partners achieve orgasm easily by masturbating or having sex with another woman. But the scandal would be much worse if everything is out in the open. Let’s consider a final example, the prostitute movement. Everyone, or just about, at first yelled, “Hurrah, prostitutes are right to rebel. But wait, you should separate the good from the bad. Prostitutes, OK, but pimps, people don’t want to hear about them.” And so, prostitutes were told that they should defend themselves, that they’re being exploited, etc. All that is absurd. Before explaining anything whatsoever, one should first try to understand what goes on between a whore and her pimp. There’s a whore-pimp-money triangle. But there also is a whole micropolitics of desire, extremely complex, which is played out between each pole in this triangle and various characters like the John and the cop. Prostitutes surely have very interesting things to teach us about these questions. And, instead of persecuting them, it would be better to subsidize them, as they do in research laboratories. I’m convinced, personally, that in studying all this micropolitics of prostitution, one might shed some new light on whole areas of conjugal and familial micropolitics—the money relations between husband and wife, parents and children, and ultimately, the psychoanalyst and his patient. (We should also recall what the anarchist of the turn of the century wrote on the subject.)